



manuscript matters : (re)collections

**A Workshop
Tombouctou Manuscripts Project
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When Roger Chartier wrote, “reading is always reading something,” he wanted to stress the tangible dimension of reading practices. In parallel, we could say that “writing is always writing on something.” Ideas and thoughts took written form and turned into manuscripts. But the vehicle for their transmission, the manuscript book, is not accidental and merely a vessel or carrier. It is a *material object*, a vehicle for the transmission of embodied knowledge. Where did the paper come from? What types of inks and pens were used? How were the manuscript leaves kept together and what went into the production of their enclosures?

We are seeking to reflect on the manuscript as a material object. We do not want to ignore content, ideas or text, but we want to explore the manuscript as a tangible object around which a set of cultural practices developed. The manuscript book, besides its materiality, also bears traces of *writing practices*. Did writers start with drafts and dispose of those drafted papers? Did they have fully formed ideas and just write them out flawlessly on a page? How many pages could they write in one session of writing? How were copies made and/or unmade?

Furthermore, manuscripts were often written to be read or studied. They bear traces of such *reading and teaching practices*. A text becomes a manuscript in order to be consumed, to participate in a public dialogue or conversation. Manuscripts were not only written and read, but also circulated, sold and collected. What was the value of a manuscript? How was it kept, stored, among other things, in a household? Does where

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and how it was kept speak of its value? Did the value of the manuscript/s change over time? In other words, reproductions or transformations of practices reflecting the *genealogy* of a manuscript and collecting culture. The formation of a collection, the book market, and movement of manuscript books are further questions that are often neglected in manuscript studies in general and in African studies in particular.

We are looking at studies that not only analyse the content of a manuscript or manuscripts, but also importantly, their material make-up, their connection to other manuscripts, their movement in and out of collections, in and out of specific towns. We are looking at studies of their life, or *biography*, from composition to circulation and the lives of collections in close detail.

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